

Self Manual Lymph Drainage

Simple and easy to perform manual techniques are an integral part of the self-management program. In this stage, the patients have completed the intensive phase with the lymphedema therapist, and are familiar with the pressures and techniques used in Manual Lymph Drainage.

Ideally, the self-MLD protocol should be performed at least once a day for about 10-15 minutes, directly preceding the exercise program, and should be followed by compression therapy.

The following are basic techniques for lymphedema affecting the upper extremity. These techniques may be changed according to specific requirements and physical limitations of the individual patient. It is important the patient understands the correct pressure to apply with the strokes and the self-MLD session should not turn into a kneading/massage session.

Step-by-Step Instructions in Self-MLD for Upper Extremity Lymphedema

Stationary circles are one of the basic manual techniques used in Manual Lymph Drainage. This stroke involves a working phase and a resting phase, and is easily learned and performed by patients suffering from lymphedema and related conditions. The stationary circles used in this self-treatment are based on the same principles as those performed by the lymphedema therapist. They should be executed using light pressure in the working phase, and during the resting phase of the circle, the hand should relax completely. The light directional pressure in the working phase also serves to move lymph fluid in the appropriate direction. It is not necessary to apply high pressures to achieve this goal. In fact, too much pressure could damage lymphatic structures. The amount of pressure is sometimes described as the pressure applied while stroking a newborn's head. The circles should be large enough to stretch the skin, but the hand should not slide over the skin. As mentioned above, the pressure is released during the resting phase, in which the elasticity of the skin moves the hand passively back to the starting position. In this pressure-free phase, small lymph vessels absorb tissue fluid from the tissues.

Self-MLD for the arm is performed best in the sitting position. Each stroke should be repeated 5-7 times on the same placement and, if not noted otherwise, the hand of the unaffected side should be used to perform the strokes.

Note:

The self-MLD techniques shown in Fig 1-1 through 1-13 depict the sequence used for a lymphedema on the left arm.

Pretreatment

Circles with the fingers lying flat above the collarbone on both sides. The pressure is directed towards the neck. It would be easiest for the right hand to manipulate the skin above the left collarbone and vice versa (Fig. 1-1)



Fig 1.1

Circles in the center of the opposite armpit. Pressure is given with the flat hand of the affected arm and is directed downward (deep) into the armpit (Fig. 1-2)



Fig 1.2

Soft strokes with both flat hands (effleurage) from the affected armpit to the armpit on the other side (Fig. 1-3)



Fig 1.3

Circles from the affected armpit to the armpit on the other side in several placements. The pressure is directed toward the armpit on the unaffected side (Fig. 1-4)



Fig 1.4

Circles with the flat hand (use affected arm) in the area of the inguinal lymph nodes on the same side. The hand lies just below the inguinal ligament (which runs approximately parallel to the lower line of your panties or briefs) and the pressure is directed towards the belly (Fig. 1-5)



Fig 1.5

Circles with the flat hand from the affected armpit to the inguinal lymph nodes on the same side in several placements (Inguinal lymph nodes are the lymph nodes, which are located in the groin area). The pressure is directed towards the inguinal lymph nodes of the same side (Fig. 1-6)



Fig 1.6

Arm

Soft effleurage strokes covering the entire arm, beginning on the hand and ending on the top of the shoulder

Circles covering the deltoid and the shoulder of the affected arm, the pressure is directed towards the neck in several placements (Fig. 1-7, 1-8)



Fig 1.7



Fig 1.8

Circles with flat fingers from the inside portion towards the outside portion of the upper arm. Work the entire upper arm from the top down to the elbow with this technique. The pressure is directed towards the outside, or lateral portion of the upper arm (Fig. 1-9)



Fig 1.9

Rework the outside portion of the upper arm from the elbow to the shoulder with circles. The pressure is directed towards the shoulder

Circles in the front of the elbow, the forearm and the hand. Turn your forearm, so you can reach all aspects of it. The pressure is always directed to the upper arm (Fig. 1-10 - 1-13)



Fig 1.10



Fig 1.11



Fig 1.12



Fig 1.13

Rework your upper arm. (You may repeat as many of the hand placements as you wish.)

Repeat steps 1, 2 and 5. (You may repeat as many of the hand placements as you wish.)